

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

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USIA-06 AID-05 CU-02 OMB-01 SAM-01 NSCE-00 SAJ-01

IO-10 EB-07 COME-00 /080 W

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R 091023Z DEC 74

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8960

INFO AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

AMEMBASSY RANGOON

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

USLO PEKING

CINCPAC HONOLULU

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 19242

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, TH, CH, TW

SUBJ: HOW TO BOOST BASKETBALL WITH POLITICAL SCANDAL, OR YOU'LL
NEVER STARVE WITH EGG ON YOUR FACE

REF: FBIS D010215Z DEC 74

SUMMARY:

THE ROC EMBASSY APPARENTLY PRESSURED SINO-THAI BUSINESSMEN
TO AVOID PROMOTING THE UPCOMING TOUR IN THAILAND OF A PRC
BASKETBALL TEAM. THE SURROUNDING CONTROVERSY HAS BECOME THE
YEAR'S "CAUSE CELEBRE" IN THE CHINESE COMMUNITY. WHILE
THE OUTCOME REMAINS UNCLEAR, THREE THINGS AT LEAST SEEM
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CERTAIN: THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC SEPARATION OF THE SINO-

THAI IN BANGKOK FROM THE REST OF THE THAI POLITY GAINED UN-FORTUNATE PUBLIC RECOGNITION; THE TOURING PRC BASKETBALL TEAM WILL HAVE A MUCH MORE LUCRATIVE GATE THAN THE PRC SOCCER TEAM GENERATED DURING ITS NOVEMBER VISIT; AND, BOTH SIDES OF THIS LITTLE POLITICAL SIDESHOW WILL WIND UP WITH EGG ON THEIR FACES. END SUMMARY.

1. BACKGROUND: WHEN THE PRC SOCCER TEAM VISITED BANGKOK IN NOVEMBER, THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS VIRTUALLY IGNORED THE EVENT AND THE GATE RECEIPTS DISAPPOINTED THE BACKERS. THE BASKETBALL ASSOCIATION OF THAILAND (BAT) WISHED TO AVOID A SIMILAR DEBACLE FOR THE DECEMBER VISIT OF A PRC BASKETBALL TEAM, BOTH FOR FINANCIAL REASONS AND TO RE-BURNISH THE GLAMOUR AND DRAWING POWER OF TOURING PRC ATHLETIC TEAMS IN THAILAND. THE THREE PRINCIPALS IN THIS BAT EFFORT ARE LENGLOET BAIYOK, A SINO-THAI BUSINESSMAN LONG INVOLVED WITH THAI-PRC AFFAIRS, RETIRED AIR CHIEF MARSHAL THAWI CHUNLASAP IN HIS CAPACITY AS THAI OLYMPIC COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN, AND RETIRED POLICE GENERAL PRASOET RUCHIRAWONG, FORMER DIRECTOR GENERAL OF NATIONAL POLICE.

2. WHAT HAPPENED FIRST: NEWSPAPER REPORTS IN MID-NOVEMBER INDICATED THAT THE ABOVE PRINCIPALS DECIDED TO ENLIST THE SUPPORT OF THE BANGKOK CHINESE COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP IN ASSURING THE PUBLIC RELATIONS AND FINANCIAL SUCCESS OF THE BASKETBALL MATCH. HUANG TSO-MING, PRESIDENT OF THE CHINESE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, CALLED A MEETING FOR NOVEMBER 26 OF 18 PROMINENT CHINESE LEADERS OF VARYING POLITICAL AFFINITIES. HUANG HIMSELF HAS FOR SOME TIME BEEN KNOWN AS A PRO-TAIWAN LEADER, BUT HAS LATELY MOVED AGILELY TOWARD THE MIDDLE OF THE LOYALTY SPECTRUM. ACM THAWI WAS APPARENTLY THE MAN WHO ASKED HUANG TO CHAIR A COMMITTEE TO PROMOTE THE BAT-SPONSORED BASKETBALL GAMES.

3. ALTHOUGH THE ORGANIZERS OF THE NOVEMBER 26 MEETING MUST HAVE EXPECTED SOME REFUSALS FROM THOSE WHOSE LOYALTIES TEND TOWARDS TAIWAN, THE INVITEES APPARENTLY STAYED AWAY IN DROVES. IT THEN SURFACED THAT THE ROC EMBASSY HAD ON NOVEMBER 23 MET WITH SEVERAL OF THE SINO-THAI INVITEES AND CONFIDENTIAL

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APPARENTLY THREATENED THEM WITH SOME FORM OF ECONOMIC SANCTIONS, PRESUMABLY REGARDING TRADE WITH TAIWAN, IF THEY ATTENDED HUANG'S MEETING ON THE 26TH. WHEN HUANG AND COMPANY LEARNED OF THE MANEUVERS, THEY COMPLAINED TO FOREIGN MINISTER CHARUMPHAN ITSARANGKUN NA AYUTTHAYA WHO TOLD THE PRESS THAT IF THE REPORTS HE WAS HEARING WERE TRUE THE ROC EMBASSY'S ACTION CONSTITUTED AN INTRUSION INTO THAI INTERNAL AFFAIRS.

4. WHAT HAPPENED NEXT: "PRACHATIPATAI" CARRIED A FEATURE STORY NOVEMBER 27 ON THE ROC EMBASSY'S PRESSURE TACTICS, AND MOST OF THE OTHER THAI AND CHINESE PAPERS CARRIED EXTENSIVE COVERAGE OF THE MATTER THE FOLLOWING DAY, THEREBY TOUCHING OFF THE PUBLIC STORM. CHARGES AND COUNTERCHARGES HAVE BEEN FLYING EVER SINCE, WITH THE ROC EMBASSY DENYING SOMEWHAT CLUMSILY ITS PRESSURE TACTICS WHILE AT THE SAME TIME PUBLICLY TELLING CHINESE BUSINESSMEN THAT SINCE BAT AND THE THAI OLYMPIC COMMITTEE ARE PRIVATE, NONGOVERNMENT AGENCIES THE BUSINESSMEN NEED NOT FEEL COMPELLED TO COMPLY WITH THEIR INSTRUCTIONS. THE CHINESE POLITICAL COUNSELOR TOLD HIS INCREDULOUS AMERICAN COUNTERPART DECEMBER 6 THAT THE CHINESE EMBASSY HAD NOT INTERFERED AT ALL.

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5. THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE PAPER "THE NATION" CARRIED AN

ARTICLE DECEMBER 1 (REF) QUOTING THAWI AS STATING THAT HE HAD A COPY OF A LETTER WRITTEN ON ROC EMBASSY STATIONARY WARNING A CERTAIN SINO-THAI BUSINESSMAN OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF HIS COOPERATING WITH ANY PROMOTIONAL EFFORT FOR THE PRC BASKETBALL TEAM'S VISIT. ACCORDING TO THIS ARTICLE, THAWI HAD SENT THE LETTER TO MFA AS "EVIDENCE". THE ARTICLE WENT ON TO IMPLY THAT THE LETTER WAS ONLY PART OF WHAT IT TERMED THE "NET OF EVIDENCE" WHICH "TIGHTENED LAST NIGHT AGAINST THE TAIWANESE EMBASSY." THIS ARTICLE ALSO CLAIMED THAT THE ROC THREATS IN THE NOVEMBER 23 MEETING INCLUDED NOT ONLY TRADE SANCTIONS BUT PERSONAL SAFETY AS WELL. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH THE ARTICLE PROBABLY HAS A GERM OF TRUTH, IT ALMOST SURELY EXAGGERATES THE DETAILS IN CONFORMITY WITH THE CONFIDENTIAL

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"NATION'S" USUAL EDITORIAL PRACTICE. END COMMENT.

6. ANOTHER PROMOTERS' MEETING TOOK PLACE ON DECEMBER 1 TO SOLICIT COOPERATION FROM THE BUSINESSMEN INVOLVED, BUT THAWI APPARENTLY DID NOT ATTEND. THE MORNING PAPERS OF DECEMBER 2 CARRIED ARTICLES DESCRIBING VARIOUS BUSINESSMEN AS HAVING PURCHASED HUNDREDS OF TICKETS, INCLUDING MR. CHEN KE-HSIU, WHO ALONE REPORTEDLY PURCHASED 120 OF THE 500 BATH (\$25) SEATS.

7. COMMENT: THE PUBLIC RELATIONS STORM CLOUDS CONCERNING THIS WHOLE AFFAIR CONTINUE TO GATHER AND DARKEN, IN PART BECAUSE OF THE READER INTEREST THIS LITTLE SCANDAL HAS FOR THE CHINESE LANGUAGE NEWSPAPER SUBSCRIBERS. BUT THE CONTINUING PUBLICITY WILL PROBABLY HARM THE INTERESTS OF THE CHINESE COMMUNITY AND THAI/SINO-THAI RELATIONS MORE THAN IT WILL HELP MATTERS BY EXPOSING THE DETAILS AND DELVING TOWARDS THE ELUSIVE "TRUTH" OF THE MATTER.

8. PEKING AND TAIPEI HAVE LONG BEEN COMPETING FOR THE LOYALTIES OF THE CHINESE COMMUNITY IN THAILAND, AND THE COMMUNITY HAS BEEN DEEPLY DIVIDED. WHILE THIS SITUATION IS NO SECRET, THE CHINESE COMMUNITY HAS PREFERRED TO KEEP THE STRUGGLE QUIET, AT LEAST IN PART TO TRY TO KEEP IT IN-HOUSE AND IN BOUNDS. AND NOW THE BAT PROMOTERS HAVE EXPOSED THE DIVISION BY FORCING THE COMMUNITY LEADERS TO DECLARE THEIR LOYALTIES PUBLICLY BY EITHER ATTENDING THE PROMOTIONAL MEETINGS OR RETURNING THEIR INVITATIONS UNANSWERED. MOREOVER, BY INVITING ONLY CHINESE COMMUNITY LEADERS TO SUPPORT THE BASKETBALL MATCH, THE BAT PROMOTERS HAVE DONE THE CHINESE COMMUNITY A FURTHER DISFAVOR BY UNDERSCORING THE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL SEPARATION OF THE SINO-THAI FROM THE REST OF THE THAI CITIZENRY.

9. THE POLITICAL SPLIT WITHIN THE CHINESE COMMUNITY OVER

LOYALTIES TO PEKING AND TAIPEI DOES NOT CORRESPOND TO OR
PARALLEL THE COLORATION OF THE CHINESE AND SINO-THAI ON
INTERNAL THAI POLITICAL MATTERS. MANY CHINESE ARE ELIGIBLE
TO VOTE, SOME ARE RUNNING FOR OFFICE, AND OTHERS ARE
ACTING AS KINGMAKERS BY BANKROLLING CANDIDATES. THE CURRENT
BROUHAHA OVER THE BASKETBALL MATCH WILL TEND TO COMPLICATE
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AN ALREADY CONFUSED THAI POLITICAL SCENE BY MIXING IN THE
PUBLIC MIND THE QUESTIONS OF THE CHINESE COMMUNITY'S INTERNAL
AND EXTERNAL LOYALTIES. THIS SITUATION CREATES PROBLEMS
THE CHINESE ELECTORAL PARTICIPANTS DO NOT NEED.

10. THE MOTIVES OF THE THREE KEY PRINCIPALS IN TRYING TO
LINE UP THE CHINESE COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT THE BASKETBALL
MATCH ARE VARIED AND NOT ALTOGETHER CLEAR. THAWI MAY BE
TRYING TO RECOUP FROM THE DISASTER OF HIS LAST ATTEMPT TO
WRING PERSONAL PUBLICITY FROM DEALING WITH THE PRC (HIS
FEBRUARY TRIP AND THE AS YET UNCONSUMMATED 75,000 TON OIL
DEAL). HE MAY ALSO FEEL THAT HE CAN GAIN FROM FANNING THE
FLAMES OVER THE ROC EMBASSY'S INTRUSIONS INTO THE MATTER.
LENGLOET MAY BE TRYING TO RECOVER FROM THE SCANDAL LAST
SPRING OVER HIS RAKE-OFF PROFITS FROM THE SHIPPING COSTS OF
PRC DIESEL OIL FOR THAILAND. HE ALSO WANTS TO INSURE A PROFIT
ON THE BASKETBALL MATCH, AND FOR POLITICAL REASONS REGAIN
THE LUSTER ATTACHED TO VISITING PRC SPORTS TEAMS. PRASOET'S
INVOLVEMENT REMAINS UNCLEAR AT THIS TIME, BUT GIVEN PRASOET'S
REPUTATION FOR HEAVY CORRUPTION, BODES ILL FOR THE WHOLE
VENTURE.

11. IN ANY EVENT, THE ROC EMBASSY IS NOW TAKING ITS LUMPS
IN THE PRESS FOR ITS DIPLOMATIC GAUCHERIES, AND MAY CONTINUE
TO FOR THE DURATION OF THE THAI ELECTION CAMPAIGN. BUT
THAWI IN PARTICULAR MAY ALSO SUFFER FROM THE WHOLE AFFAIR.
FOR WHATEVER THE SINS OF THE ROC EMBASSY, THAWI, LENGLOET
AND PRASOET HAD NO RIGHT TO PRESSURE THE CHINESE COMMUNITY
LEADERSHIP TO SUPPORT THE BASKETBALL GAMES. THEY MAY END
UP ACCUSED OF HAVING PROVOKED THE WHOLE CONTRETEMPS FOR
PERSONAL POLITICAL AND FINANCIAL GAIN. WHILE THE WHOLE LITTLE
TEMPEST HAS THE POTENTIAL TO EXACERBATE LATENT THAI-CHINESE
ANIMOSITIES, NEITHER SIDE WANTS THIS SITUATION TO OCCUR.
WE CAN THUS EXPECT TO SEE PRESSURE TO TONE DOWN THE PRESS
PLAY AND PAPER OVER THE DIFFERENCES.

12. ONE THING IS VIRTUALLY CERTAIN, HOWEVER. THE WHOLE
AFFAIR WILL FULFILL THE BOOSTERS' ORIGINAL HOPES BY
ASSURING A FAT TAKE AT THE BOX OFFICE.
MASTERS

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